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ABSTRACT

In 1996 North Carolinians approved the largest bond issue in the state's history, thus sending a message of support for public schools. The next step is to make sure that the quality of instruction in North Carolina schools matches the new facilities approved by over 70 percent of the state's voters. This report outlines the steps needed to build world-class schools in North Carolina that advance the priorities established by the State Board of Education. The report was developed by the School Improvement Panel, which was appointed by the Governor and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The goals of the plan are to: (1) coordinate initiatives, programs, and assessments into a unified system; (2) provide educators with the tools and time needed to achieve high standards; and (3) create partnerships for safe schools and high standards. Four initiatives provide the cornerstones of the foundation. The report delineates recommended strategies to achieve each of the three goals in the School Improvement Panel's plan. Foremost among them is the State Board of Education's ABC's Plan that provides the framework for recommendations that follow. The ABC's Plan is based on the principles of holding schools accountable, focusing on the basics, and returning control to local level. The other three initiatives include the North Carolina Education Standards and Accountability Commission, the Commission on Workforce Preparedness, and the School-Based Management Task Force. (LMI)

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BRINGING it all TOGETHER

for CHILDREN in PUBLIC SCHOOLS North Carolina

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By 2001, North Carolina's public schools will have a system in place to become a model for states and nations. We dream to install in them a system that develops every person's capacity to create and apply knowledge at high levels of performance, a strength of character, and a love of learning that will empower them to be successful and useful members of a free society.

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BRINGING it all TOGETHER

ar CHILDREN in PUBLIC SCHOOLS North Carolina

Executive Summary 2

Introduction: A Vision For Schools 4

Goal 1: Bringing It All Together Into A Unified System 6
- What Are World-Class Standards?
- What Our System Should Be
- Strategies For Success

Goal 2: Providing Tools & Time To Achieve High Standards 10
- Provide Training
- Provide Time
- Provide Incentives
- Enable Schools To Harness The Potential Of Technology
- Coordinate Research And Put It In The Hands Of Educators
- Devise A System Of School Funding

Goal 3: Partnering For Safe Schools & High Standards 16
- Equip Educators With Skills To Create Safe Environments
- Use Time & Adult Contact To Create Safe Environments
- Establish Alternative School Programs
- Equip Educators & Parents With Approaches That Build Healthy Schools
- Improve The Educational Climate Of Schools
- Partner With The Public To Achieve High Standards
- Build Partnership Capacity
- Build Reciprocal Partnerships With Business
- Expand Schooling With Real-World Learning
- Base Partnerships On Clear Assessments Of Needs

February 1997

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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When North Carolinians went to the polls in the 1996 General Election, they sent a strong message of support for public schools. By approving the largest bond issue in the state's history – $1.8 billion earmarked for school construction – they made it clear that they want a system of schools of which they can be proud. More importantly, they want the young people of North Carolina to have schools that are second to none.

The next step is to make sure that the quality of instruction occurring inside North Carolina's school buildings is equal to the new facilities approved by over 70% of the state's voters. What follows is a road map outlining the steps it will take to build a programmatic foundation for world-class schools that advances the priorities established by the State Board of Education.

For over one year, a hard-working School Improvement Panel, appointed by the Governor and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, has labored over this recommended plan. Its work was shaped by the hopes of people across North Carolina. It is to those people – the people who overwhelmingly made it clear that they want schools that they can be proud of, schools capable of equipping their children for the future – that this plan is dedicated.

GOAL 1: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER INTO A UNIFIED SYSTEM

- Bring the dozens of promising school improvement initiatives into one, coherent plan and marshal all of the state's resources behind it.
- Set in place a timetable that ensures that world-class curriculum and assessment practices are in place by 2001; focus the system on the application of knowledge and skills, not on rote memorization.
- Establish benchmarks that require 10th graders and high school seniors to demonstrate they have mastered the basics before they move ahead or graduate.
- Incorporate programs that better prepare high school graduates for higher education and the world of work.
- Build public awareness and support for the changes this plan will bring to schools across North Carolina.

GOAL 2: PROVIDING EDUCATORS WITH THE TOOLS AND TIME NEEDED TO ACHIEVE HIGH STANDARDS

- Revamp and strengthen the quality of teacher and administrative preparation programs.
- Lengthen, by 2001, North Carolina's instructional year to be the longest in the nation – moving from today's 180 days of instruction to 190 days.
- Compensate teachers at a rate at or above the national average through a combination of a more competitive professional salary schedule, extended contracts and the creation of challenging new roles for teachers with appropriate compensation.
- Align all of the state's many training resources behind an integrated professional development program that equips educators with the skills and knowledge they need to advance school improvement.
- Establish a Research Council charged with focusing on coordinating research in school improvement and putting the results into the hands of teachers and administrators.
- Bring the instructional promise of technology to every school in North Carolina.
- Devise an equitable system of funding schools that respects the enormous differences that exist among communities and school systems.

GOAL 3: PARTNERING FOR SAFE SCHOOLS AND HIGH STANDARDS

- Ensure that every school is a safe secure learning environment.
- Collaborate and partner with the public to bring education standards to a new level.

Thankfully, the job of bringing it all together for school improvement begins with the building blocks already in place. The pages that follow will show how these building blocks provide a way for the State Board of Education to work through its top priorities in a systematic fashion. In devising its recommendations, the Panel began with the framework of the ABCs Plan that is based on accountability, a focus on the basics of education and the belief that local schools and communities can best make decisions about their schools. What follows builds on that plan while advancing the priorities of the State Board of Education which include: professional educator issues; reading, the Standard Course of Study and the Basic Education Program; legislative matters, including equitable funding and teacher salaries; technology; satisfaction with public schools; communication and collaborative relationships; accountability; safety; and funding and finance.

Goals

GOAL I: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER INTO A UNIFIED SYSTEM

To bring successful school improvement initiatives together into a unified system of standards, curriculum and accountability that will prepare every public school graduate as a life-long learner for participation in a democratic society and in the world of work.

GOAL 2: PROVIDING THE TOOLS AND TIME TO ACHIEVE HIGH STANDARDS

To provide teachers and schools with the time, training, research, resources and technology it will take to reach the rigorous standards needed to bring our schools to world-class status.

GOAL 3: PARTNERING FOR SAFE SCHOOLS AND HIGH STANDARDS

- To ensure that every school is a safe, secure learning environment.
- To collaborate and partner with the public to bring education standards to a new level.

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A VISION FOR SCHOOLS

For the past year, the North Carolina School Improvement Panel, appointed by the Governor and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, has listened to people across North Carolina as it framed recommendations to strengthen the state's public schools.

Through polls, focus groups, hearings and studies conducted by the Panel, research groups and other state commissions, it is clear that the people of North Carolina know what they want from their schools.

- North Carolinians want their public schools to equal the quality of the best in the world.
- North Carolinians want newcomers to enroll their children in public schools with confidence and enthusiasm.
- Employers and colleges want graduates of North Carolina's public schools to be able to apply lessons they have learned, and to be prepared to continue to learn as adults.
- Parents and employers want a tangible connection between schooling and the real world.
- Everyone wants North Carolina's public schools to be safe and orderly places.
- Educators want both respect and support from their communities; they want to feel pride in the schools in which they work.

These are the highest hopes the people hold for their public schools. These hopes – hopes that would lead to schools second to none – guided the Panel as it worked on behalf of the young people of North Carolina.

The Building Blocks Are in Place

Thankfully, when the Panel was charged with designing a plan that would enable North Carolina's schools to reach new heights, there was much on which the panel could build. Thanks to the work of the Governor, the General Assembly, the State Board of Education, pioneering schools and educators, businesses, nonprofit organizations and concerned citizens, the building blocks for a foundation of excellence already exist. The challenge that fell to the Panel was to bring today's initiatives together.

Four initiatives provide the cornerstones of the foundation. Foremost among them is the State Board of Education's ABCs Plan that provides the framework for all of the recommendations that follow.

ABCs Plan
The ABCs Plan reflects simple, but powerful, beliefs – that schools should be held accountable to high standards; that all children graduating from North Carolina's schools should have a solid grasp of reading, mathematics, writing and technology skills; that local communities and educators should be empowered to make vital decisions about schools.

The work of three other groups, when brought together inside the framework of the ABCs Plan, completes the cornerstones upon which excellence can be built.

NC Education Standards and Accountability Commission
The Standards and Accountability Commission's proposed system of high standards and performance assessment directly builds and strengthens the accountability component of the ABCs Plan by adding student accountability to a model of school accountability.

Commission on Workforce Preparedness
The Commission on Workforce Preparedness' goal of better preparing all young people for the world of work through its JobReady initiative is aligned with the educational basics philosophy of the ABCs Plan.

School-Based Management Task Force
The School-Based Management Task Force's belief that the people closest to children and schools are in the best position to make educational decisions builds the local control component of the ABCs Plan.

Not a Job for the Faint-Hearted

The recommendations of the Panel will enhance the ABCs Plan by marshaling all of the many resources of North Carolina behind a unified effort to make our public schools second to none.

The strategies that follow will challenge all of us. They will cause change within schools and communities. They will ask more of young people and their parents. They will stretch the capacity of educators and the institutions that train them. They will require lawmakers to make difficult choices.

The journey has already begun. As North Carolina has proven so many times before, it has the capacity to take bold steps. Indeed, it has taken the first steps already through actions in the General Assembly, the State Board of Education and in communities across the state.

The Panel, convinced that education offers North Carolina the best, and perhaps only, sure course to a better tomorrow, offers these strategies with a sense of urgency. The strategies provide a systematic way for the State Board of Education to work through each of its priorities – the priorities of the people of North Carolina – because it will take all of us working together to achieve our vision of schools that are second to none.

The Essential Components of the ABCs Plan
• A Hold Schools Accountable
• B Focus on the Basics
• C Return Control to Schools and Communities

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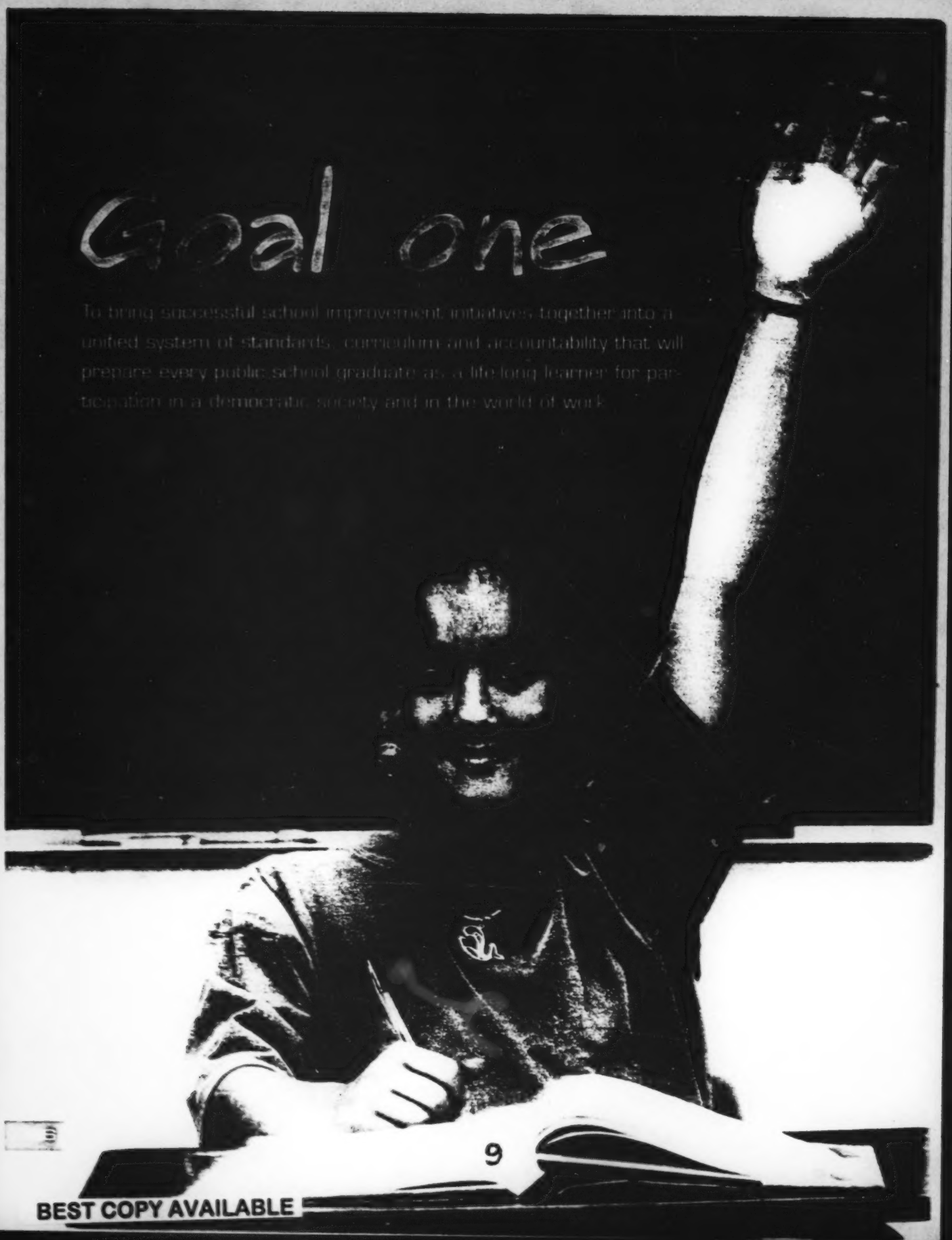
Goal one

To bring successful school improvement initiatives together into a unified system of standards, curriculum and accountability that will prepare every public school graduate as a life-long learner for participation in a democratic society and in the world of work.



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BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER INTO A UNIFIED SYSTEM

Building Blocks In Place

THE ABCs PLAN
The State Board of Education's ABCs Plan already requires young people to demonstrate their mastery of basic skills including writing, reading, mathematics and technology.

NC STANDARD COURSE OF STUDY
The North Carolina Standard Course of Study outlines rigorous course content upon which assessments are based and calls for integration of science, social studies, literature and the arts.

STATE TESTING PROGRAMS
State testing programs, aligned with the Standard Course of Study, require students to demonstrate their learning in reading, writing, mathematics and technology.

CONSEQUENCES FOR SCHOOLS
The General Assembly created financial incentives for schools that exceed student growth goals and put in place technical assistance and serious consequences for those that lag behind.

IDENTIFIED COMPETENCY AREAS
The Standards and Accountability Commission has further defined the relationship of what students should know and be able to do with content knowledge. Six competency areas in which graduates must demonstrate a high level of proficiency have been identified.

PLANS FOR STRENGTHENING CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT
Concrete recommendations and plans for strengthening today's curriculum and assessment programs have been designed by the Standards and Accountability Commission.

SCHOOL SYSTEMS PILOTING NEW ASSESSMENTS
School systems are piloting new types of assessments that measure how well students can apply what they have learned.

JOBREADY PILOT PROJECTS
JobReady pilot partnerships of employers, educators and others have created school-to-work transition programs in 66 communities with more scheduled to begin.

NC CONSOLIDATED PLAN
The process for alignment of federal resources to support a focused approach to school improvement has begun with North Carolina's Consolidated Plan for federal programs.

Recommended Strategies

A FOUR-YEAR PLAN
Consolidate the implementation schedules of existing school improvement initiatives into one four-year plan.

STRENGTHEN INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES
Strengthen today's instruction and assessment practices to ensure they meet world-class standards and prepare young people for the transition from high school to the world of work or college.

ELIMINATE GENERAL TRACKS
Eliminate "general tracks" in high schools; by today's needs they do not adequately prepare students for work or for college.

END "SOCIAL PROMOTION"
End remaining practices of "social promotion" and ensure that young people can perform at their grade level before being promoted from one grade to the next.

ENACT 10TH GRADE COMPETENCY EXAM
Require 10th grade students to pass a basic competency examination to qualify for a diploma.

ENACT AN EXIT EXAM
Require graduates to pass an exit examination that will demonstrate to parents, colleges and employers that North Carolina graduates are prepared as they leave high school.

INTEGRATE A SYSTEM FOR WORKFORCE PREPAREDNESS
Integrate the workforce preparedness concepts of the JobReady initiative into school curricula so that all young people will be better prepared to make the transition from high school to adulthood.

ESTABLISH CAREER PATHWAYS
Establish career pathways for all students that result in career development plans that are updated annually.

INTRODUCE IMPROVED STUDENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES
Introduce new assessment practices that give timely, specific, diagnostic information to teachers, enabling them to pinpoint individual student needs.

INITIATE TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS
Provide training and information about ways in which quality principles can have a positive impact on student learning.

COORDINATE TEACHER TRAINING RESOURCES
Marshal the state's existing teacher training resources, including schools of education at the college level, in an intensive and integrated program of teacher training that will support the proposed changes.

INITIATE A PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS/OUTREACH PROGRAM
Prepare parents, communities and educators for the changes ahead by launching a massive communications and outreach program.

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What Are World-Class Standards?

When people discuss engineering or technology, there is a generally accepted standard that is considered world class. When people discuss education, however, the words "world-class standards" are less understood.

For over three years, the Standards and Accountability Commission studied schools around the world in order to find out what makes schools in some countries better than those in others. The Commission isolated basic elements that are the hallmarks of excellent schools. In nations that excel in education, one will find these characteristics:

- Highly Specific Curriculum Goals and Assessment Practices
  There is clarity around what children should know and be able to do upon graduation.
- Publicized Curriculum Goals/Assessment Practices
  There is no mystery surrounding the goals of schools or the nature of student tests. In fact, in some countries, parents can buy samples showing exactly what kinds of tests their children will be expected to pass.
- Rigorous Expectations
  World-class schools expect much of their young people.
- Learning and Tests that have Consequences
  There are high stakes when it comes to assessment. In world-class schools, tests count; learning counts. Advancement within schools, acceptance into college and in some countries, where one will work all depend on school performance.
- Inclusive Standards
  Curriculum, instruction and assessment are designed in such a way that all children work toward the same high standards.
- Measurable Progress
  Standards that cannot be measured do not count. World-class schools focus on standards that can be measured, and measurement occurs often.

What Our System Should Be

The Panel's recommendation is to align curriculum frameworks, instructional practices and assessment programs that are, by any measure, world class. The Panel also proposes the following criteria by which the quality of North Carolina's curriculum, instruction and assessment programs will be measured.

Our system of schools should be:

- Based on high standards for all
- Focused on knowledge and skills that can be applied in the real world
- Organized so that there is continuous and measurable improvement
- Based on the philosophy of local control and maximum flexibility in meeting these standards
- Designed to meet the needs of all children, including those with special educational needs
- Organized across subject areas and encouraging students to apply knowledge from subjects as diverse as science, the arts, mathematics and literature
- Held in esteem by the public and highly accountable
- Designed to be fair and equitable in its approaches to all involved

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Building The System: Strategies For Success

At the heart of the Panel's strategies is a belief that for too long schools have focused on covering material, not on ensuring that young people can use and apply the knowledge and skills they have learned. The Panel, like the State Board of Education, is convinced not only that schools must focus first on basic skills like reading, writing, mathematics and technology, but that students must be able to demonstrate that they can use those basic skills.

Central to the strategies is a testing and assessment approach that calls on young people to demonstrate that they have mastered what they have learned – an approach that will challenge young people to solve problems similar to those they will encounter as adults.

A sharper focus on demonstrating mastery of material is also central to the JobReady goals of better preparing young people to enter the work world. JobReady is introducing students to career counseling and awareness programs at a young age, exposing students to job opportunities within the community, giving young people experience and training in the workplace that can lead them to successfully completing demanding course work in community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and to real jobs with real futures.

Basic to these strategies is equipping teachers and administrators with new skills, be they in using different assessment practices or in providing career awareness counseling to young people. The Panel recommends that the state focus its many training resources on the singular task of successfully preparing educators for this transition period. College and university-based schools of education, the North Carolina Teacher Academy, and the Principals Executive Program are but a few of the training centers that are positioned to provide teachers and administrators with the new skills they need.

It will be difficult if not impossible for North Carolina to reach world-class standards if the school day and year remain organized as they are. There are too few days in the year to do what we already ask of schools; more time must be provided if we are to reach world-class standards.

Goal two

To provide teachers and schools with the time, training, research, resources and technology it will take to reach the rigorous standards needed to bring our schools to world-class status.

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PROVIDING THE TOOLS & TIME TO ACHIEVE HIGH STANDARDS

Building Blocks In Place

TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM REVIEW
North Carolina has initiated a demanding exit examination required of all prospective teachers as well as a systematic review of the quality of college and university programs.

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS
North Carolina has the nation's largest and most ambitious scholarship programs for prospective teachers, the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program and the Prospective Teachers Program. North Carolina also has a recently established Principals Fellows Program that is attracting and training highly-promising school administrators.

TEACHER/ADMINISTRATIVE LICENSURE STANDARDS
In the area of teacher and administrative licensure, North Carolina is piloting new and demanding teacher assessment programs. The Professional Standards Board, the Standards Board for Public School Administration and the State Board of Education are currently working to create streamlined and more rigorous licensure standards.

SUPPORT FOR NEW TEACHERS
A number of pioneering school systems are focusing on induction through the Collaborative Effort to Support New Professionals and with clinical coaching programs offered by North Carolina State University and East Carolina University.

THE COMMISSION ON TEACHING AND AMERICA'S FUTURE
The recently released recommendations of a national commission chaired by North Carolina's Governor Hunt provide a powerful road map for policymakers and educators searching for ways to strengthen the teaching profession.

NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION
North Carolina leads the nation in establishing incentives to encourage teachers to become nationally certified. Our efforts have been rewarded by North Carolina's having the highest number of nationally certified teachers in the nation.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT
North Carolina's investment in professional development has led to the establishment of the nationally recognized Center for the Advancement of Teaching, the Principals Executive Program and the Teacher Academy.

EXTRA SUPPORT TO LOW WEALTH/SMALL SCHOOLS
The General Assembly is providing supplemental funding to small and poor schools to adjust for inability of local taxes to support their educational program.

INTRODUCTION OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES
Pioneering school systems under Total Quality Education (TQE) are successfully integrating total quality management principles into new approaches to professional development, school organization and student instruction and assessment.

Recommended Strategies

IMPROVE TRAINING AND PREPARATION OF EDUCATORS
Improve teacher preparation, licensure, training and selection of school administrators, new teacher induction, professional development and teacher evaluation.

PROVIDE MORE TIME FOR INSTRUCTION, PLANNING AND TRAINING
Phase in more days for instruction and for teacher training and preparation.

CREATE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO SUPPORT, REWARD AND RETAIN GOOD TEACHERS
Establish financial incentives to attract good teachers to low wealth/low performing schools. Devise salary scales for educators comparable to those in other professions. Provide differentiated job roles that lead to growth and financial opportunity for competent teachers.

ENABLE SCHOOLS TO HARNESS TECHNOLOGY
Follow the technology road map drawn by the NC Commission on School Technology.

COORDINATE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT RESEARCH AND PUT IT IN THE HANDS OF EDUCATORS
Establish a Research Council charged with coordinating research efforts that focus on school improvement.

DEVISE A FUNDING SYSTEM THAT FAIRLY MEETS THE NEEDS OF ALL SCHOOLS
Appoint a task force to advise the Governor, the State Board of Education and the General Assembly on a more efficient way to distribute state funds to schools and to better use existing resources. The task force should also consider the range of issues (e.g. physical and mental health, job opportunities, literacy and day care availability) that have an impact on a child's readiness to learn and opportunity to succeed. In the meantime, the General Assembly should complete the appropriations needed by the supplemental fund for low wealth/small schools.

We cannot expect students, teachers and administrators to reach dramatically higher levels of results unless schools and educators are provided the skills and time needed to motivate the 1.2 million children who attend school each day.

STRATEGY: Provide Better Training & Preparation Of Educators

It is important to begin any discussion about the educators working in North Carolina's schools by recognizing that they are doing the best job they have ever done. More young people than ever before graduate; more go on to college or university; for the first time, North Carolina's young people are above national averages on important measures such as the new National Assessment of Educational Progress tests; and SAT scores show continuous progress.

However, the state is now asking educators to make a quantum quality leap in the drive to meet world-class standards. Very simply, that means there must be as much attention paid to better equip teachers and administrators as there is to establishing high standards for students.

When one looks at North Carolina's educational workforce there are troubling facts to be considered. Over 40% of all those who begin teaching in North Carolina's schools leave within five years. Low-wealth and low-performing schools find it more and more difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers. Most alarming, North Carolina is adding over 20,000 new students per year, compounding the challenge of attracting and retaining qualified teachers even greater. On average, the state will need to hire over 6,000 new teachers each year between now and 2001 – that is 24,000 new teachers, one-third of today's total.

The Panel's recognition of the importance of teaching led it to recommend more rigorous selection procedures in schools of education and accountability benchmarks that will hold schools of education accountable; further, the Panel recommends a revamped evaluation system that requires educators to demonstrate quality performance.

FOCUS ON TEACHER PREPARATION

- Revamp today's teacher preparation programs beginning with higher standards of acceptance into schools of education, closer ties between schools of education and public schools and drawing on public school teachers to bring more real world experience into the preparation of teachers.
- Hold schools of education accountable by tracking graduates and publicizing their success, failure and attrition rates in the teaching profession.
- Establish formalized communications vehicles between schools of education and schools of the arts and sciences and among schools of education and their public schools.
- Require that standards for schools of education include required courses that prepare teachers to work with diverse student populations and to utilize technology in their classrooms. Standards should also require that teacher preparation programs increase the amount and quality of time prospective teachers spend training in public school settings.
- Develop a new and demanding system of licensure for teachers.

FOCUS ON ADMINISTRATORS

- Implement the recommendations of the Standards Board for Public School Administration.
- Establish more rigorous selection criteria for school administrators based on the best available research on schools and leadership.
- Require school administrators to have teaching experience prior to becoming school principals; experience as a principal should be a prerequisite for becoming a school superintendent.
- Provide training on selection of school administrators for local boards of education and school improvement teams.

FOCUS ON NEW TEACHER INDUCTION

- Provide funds to enable all schools to offer training and support to new teachers prior to the opening of each school year.
- Establish a mentoring program for new teachers to guarantee that all new teachers receive training and support from capable, veteran teachers and that they have the time needed to observe other teachers while sharpening their own skills.

STRATEGY: Provide More Time For Instruction, Planning & Training

Whenever the Panel met with educators, one issue was raised over and over again – the lack of time is perceived as the primary barrier to improving schools.

The lack of time has an impact on schooling in three ways. First, our students are compared to students in other countries who receive the equivalent of four additional years of schooling because our 180-day school calendar is so short. On average, other industrialized countries provide over 200 instructional days. Some, like Japan and Germany, provide over 240 instructional days.

Second, the structure of the typical school day denies teachers the time they need to work with individual students and to thoughtfully plan challenging instructional approaches. And finally, there is too little time for quality staff development programs.

MORE INSTRUCTIONAL AND TEACHER WORK DAYS

The Panel concluded that the state must embark on a phase-in plan leading to an extended number of instructional days for students and additional planning and training days for teachers.

The Panel recommends adding additional instructional days to the existing school calendar each year between now and 2001, thus expanding the number of instructional days from 180 to 190. At the same time, the Panel recommends that the state extend teacher contracts to 220 days – or 11 months – by 2001.

FLEXIBLE DAYS OF EMPLOYMENT

The Panel is also recommending that the state grant local schools salary funds that could be used to address the local needs of schools and communities. This would require an allocation of one-half of 1% of payroll each year between now and 2001. The final impact would be to provide local schools 2% of payroll enabling them to hire teachers for additional days in a variety of ways that would have the potential of increasing student performance or teacher productivity. At the heart of this recommendation is the belief that the needs of schools vary. As examples, some communities may use additional salary dollars for summer remedial or enrichment courses. In others, the funds might be more efficiently used to enable entire departments or grade-level teams to revamp their curricula during the summer. In still others, the funds might be used to provide intensive and extended professional development programs or to support teachers in year-round leadership roles.

FOCUS ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Align state resources to conduct an integrated, intensive teacher training program on instruction and assessment.
- Develop a comprehensive professional development package that will give local systems access to training critical to the success of state mandated initiatives.
- Conduct a study of investments in professional development by North Carolina's top 100 businesses and industries and establish a professional development funding target of not less than the industry average.
- Provide local schools with best-practice models in the area of professional development to ensure that professional development meets the needs of individual teachers; focuses on improvements in student performance; and aligns with best teaching practices that could lead to national board certification.

FOCUS ON EVALUATION

- Formalize a beginning teacher evaluation program based on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.
- Encourage schools to experiment with innovative approaches to evaluating experienced teachers.

PROVIDING MORE TIME TO DO THE JOB

School Year	Instruction Days	Length of Teacher Contract (in days)	Flexible Salary (% of payroll)
1996-1997	180	200	0
1997-1998	183	205	.05%
1998-1999	186	210	1.0%
1999-2000	188	215	1.5%
2000-2001	190	220	2.0%

STRATEGY: Provide Incentives That Respect & Reward Educators

Valuing the centrality of teachers to the process of school improvement, the Panel focused on creating several avenues through which teacher compensation could be made more competitive. The previous recommendation, calling for extending the length of the school year for both students and teachers would increase salaries by roughly 10%. Moreover, the establishment of a flexible salary fund to meet local needs would provide another 2% of salary dollars.

With that, the Panel is calling on the state to reward capable teachers who are able and willing to assume extra responsibilities such as mentoring new teachers, providing training for other teachers or being a resource in areas such as school technology.

The Panel believes that today's compensation system does not provide adequate incentives or rewards to teachers who contribute more to their students and schools. By putting in place financial rewards for teachers who are a resource to their schools, the state would give tangible evidence that it valued the contribution of master teachers.

Low-performing schools that badly need high-quality teachers find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain capable teachers. Low-performing schools are often found in the state's poorest communities. Frequently, a lack of housing, shopping, university and recreational options makes it difficult to compete with other communities. Also, locally-funded salary supplements tend to be low or non-existent, complicating the recruiting challenge these communities already face. If the state is to succeed in ensuring that all schools meet the rigorous demands of the ABCs Plan, the Panel believes it will be necessary to provide incentives that would attract teachers to high-need schools.

Finally, the State Board of Education should devise new salary schedules for both teachers and administrators that are both fair and competitive when compared to salaries paid to professionals in the private sector.

STRATEGY: Enable Schools To Harness The Potential Of Technology

When listening to North Carolinians speak about education, parents and employers alike stressed the need to focus on what is now considered a new "basic" – technology. As more and more parents and teachers are discovering, the potential for technology to transform and accelerate learning opportunities for young people is enormous.

Recognizing that a learning gap of major proportions could develop between technology-rich and technology-poor schools, the General Assembly established a School Technology Fund and a plan that would ensure that all schools, rich or poor, would have access to the potential of technology. The history of the Fund, however, is spotty. Funds allocated in 1994 were not released until two school years later. A second appropriation made to the Fund in the 1996 session of the General Assembly was less than one-half of the amount called for by the state's technology plan. The Panel believes it is imperative that the state stay on course with the plan of the North Carolina Commission on School Technology to ensure that all schools and all students have the benefits of technology.

STRATEGY: Coordinate Research & Put It In The Hands Of Educators

North Carolina has a massive amount of information about what works in schools, but too frequently that information is not used. North Carolina is blessed with a wealth of educational research resources. However, too little of this research is aligned with the goals of the ABCs Plan and less yet reaches classroom teachers who can translate research findings into new and better ways to work with students.

The Panel recommends establishing a Research Council to pull together the state's education research providers in colleges and universities, state government and nonprofit organizations. Through the Council, collaborative research projects would examine issues directly related to school improvement. Early research topics that the Council should consider include: more effective use of time within the school day; effective models for alternative educational programs tailoring instruction to the special needs student; better use of existing resources, and; the impact of school size on instruction.

The Council should also train the people who can best use educational research in how to access, understand and use findings. With that, findings that would support the goals of the ABCs Plan need to be readily available and broadly disseminated.

The Panel recommends that the Research Council be placed under the Education Cabinet, a body that is chaired by the Governor and includes the heads of the state's university, community college, and public school systems. Because all three levels of education in North Carolina have research capacities and all depend on one another, a research arm working through all three systems would have far more potential than one housed within a single system.

STRATEGY: Devise A School Funding System That Fairly Meets The Needs Of All Schools

The final recommendation under the Panel's goal of providing educators and schools with the tools they need to succeed speaks to the way in which North Carolina funds its schools. Today's system of funding does not adequately take into account the profound differences among schools and communities within North Carolina. The Panel strongly believes that the state should embrace the creation of a new and better system of school funding.

The Panel recommends that the State Board of Education appoint a task force to provide advice on a more effective and efficient and equitable way to distribute state funds to schools. Differences among school systems should be accommodated – including differences in growth in student population, the number of children with special educational needs, the capacity of the local communities to fund quality schools, the education performance of students, physical and mental health data, literacy rates, availability of day care facilities and the effort made by local taxpayers. A critical first step for the task force would be to examine today's use of resources, the alignment of state funds with the ABCs Plan and with other state and federal programs having an impact on children, and more efficient ways to use our tax dollars.

While the task force grapples with issues related to funding formulas and flexibility, the General Assembly should complete the process of fully funding the supplemental fund for low-wealth schools.

Just as the state recognizes that the differing educational needs of communities make local flexibility a necessary cornerstone of school improvement, so must it recognize that its system of funding schools must accommodate local differences.

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PARTNERING FOR SAFE SCHOOLS & HIGH STANDARDS

Building Blocks In Place

FOR SAFETY

- Laws that establish schools as gun-free zones.
- Funding for alternative school programs for troubled youth.
- Funding for school resource officers in all of the state's high schools.
- Special services for young people with special needs.
- Over fifteen nonprofit agencies/organizations, including the Center for the Prevention of School Violence, Communities in Schools, the Child Advocacy Institute and others, are already providing technical assistance and coordinating programs for children with special needs.
- Two major public/private initiatives, Support our Students (SOS) and Smart Start, are bringing badly needed service and support to at-risk young people.
- The current law that establishes school-based management requires school improvement plans be developed by staff and parents in schools.

FOR PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

- Over two-thirds of North Carolina's 117 school systems have formed partnerships with local businesses or chambers of commerce.
- Dozens of organizations are concentrated on school improvement, school/business partnerships, school-to-work transitions, and the special needs of schools. Collaboration among these organizations and schools is thriving throughout the state. JobReady partnerships are excellent models of this effort.
- Several collaborative initiatives, like NCBCE's TQE Initiative and Public Service of North Carolina's Ambassador's Program, incorporate community training programs, total quality management principles, formalized partnership agreements and evaluation benchmarks that could be models for other communities.
- Government supported collaborative efforts such as Smart Start and SOS rely on a blend of government and local funding as well as extensive volunteer time and effort.
- A new umbrella organization, NC Partners, is beginning to network dozens of organizations that collaborate with schools in an effort to focus partnerships even more clearly on school improvement.
- Total Quality Education (TQE) pilot programs have documented success in practicing collaborative decision-making, diminishing discipline issues and improving student achievement.

Recommended Strategies

- Ensure that all schools are safe and inviting places for students, educators and parents.
- Engage communities, schools, businesses and the public-at-large in a collaborative crusade to bring education standards to new levels.

FOR SAFETY

- Equip educators with the knowledge and skills to create safe learning environments.
- Reorganize school environments and instructional time to create safer, more inviting environments.
- Establish high-quality alternative school programs.
- Equip educators with instructional approaches that build healthier schools.
- Measure, on an ongoing basis, data on issues contributing to the educational climate of a school.
- Enter partnerships with the community and communicate with the public about roles, rules and expectations regarding safety and discipline.

FOR COLLABORATION

- Build school/business partnership capacity through training and partnership skill building.
- Build school/business partnerships with community organizations through reciprocation.
- Expand the scope of schooling by offering real-world learning experiences.
- Base partnerships on clear agreements and assessments of needs.

The bedrock for successful learning environments must be safe schools. Further, schools must be surrounded by concerned, caring communities with schools as a top priority.

Thus, what follows are strategies aimed both at educators and the communities in which they work. The Panel believes it is vital that a school climate is inviting to students and assures parents that their children are cared for and learning. To create that climate, educators need assurance that communities share their goal of creating a secure school environment in which all students can reach world-class standards. In short, the Panel believes schools parents, and communities must be partners for children.

Partnering For Safe Schools

The Panel believes that the long-range answer to ensuring safe schools is to develop thoughtful, research-proven programs that will equip educators with the tools they need to deal with the increasingly complex mix of student needs and problems.

As in other areas of school improvement, North Carolina is fortunate to have schools, associations and nonprofit organizations already focused on issues related to school safety. The Panel, in making its recommendations, drew heavily on those groups for solutions. Although problems related to school safety are largely problems of our society, it falls to the schools to deal with them. Thus, student problems stemming from too little adult support and unstable home and community lives are realities that now confront the public schools.

However, because the problems of school safety and educational climate are societal problems, these recommendations call for school and community collaboration as we work toward safe schools, schools that are environments in which learning can take place.

STRATEGY: Equip Educators With Skills To Create Safe Environments

- Teacher preparation programs should include course work and school-based experiences. Prospective teachers need training in strategies that succeed with at-risk students, conflict resolution tools, diversity training, exposure to different learning styles and experience with special-needs children.
- In-school professional development should equip teachers to gather data about children, families and communities and use that data to build child-centered partnerships with homes and communities.

STRATEGY: Use Time & Adult Contact To Create Safe Environments

- School principals, faculties and students should make school safety a priority and be held accountable for the learning climate that exists in their schools.
- Classrooms and time should be organized in such a way that young people spend more time with adults; successful strategies employ the use of volunteers, work-based learning experiences, flexible scheduling and before-and after-school partnerships.
- The State Board of Education should encourage and support year-round schools and flexible scheduling.

STRATEGY: Establish Alternative School Programs

- The State Board of Education should establish a quality framework that would grant local communities wide latitude in how they structure alternative school programs while ensuring quality standards for the young people they serve.
- Such a framework of standards should include validated models of alternative schooling and public/private partnerships, qualifications for personnel working in alternative schools, collaborative benchmarks that ensure inter-agency cooperation among schools and other governmental service agencies, diagnostic tools that assess progress, and an annual evaluation of data related to the success of alternative schools.

STRATEGY: Equip Educators & Parents With Approaches That Build Healthy Schools

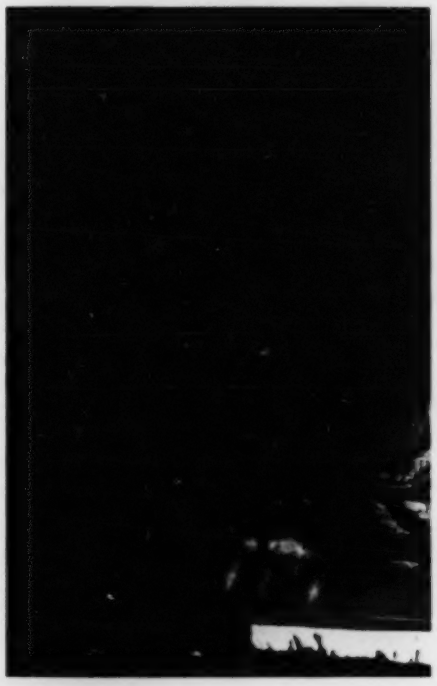
- Character education programs beginning in kindergarten and extending through high school graduation should be introduced in all schools.
- Using research that has pinpointed best practices, the State Board of Education should develop professional training programs for school resource officers.
- The State Board of Education should recognize schools that are successfully creating a healthy learning environment within schools and disseminate the strategies they are using to other schools.
- The State Board of Education should disseminate successful models that employ different instructional strategies – such as technology in the classroom, service learning, Tech Prep and JobReady – to motivate at-risk youngsters to succeed.

STRATEGY: Improve The Educational Climate Of Schools

- In-school Climate Review Committees should annually analyze data such as the incidence of acts of school violence, the results of school climate surveys, student data on academic performance, attendance, discipline and other issues contributing to the climate of a school.
- The State Board of Education should provide technical assistance to schools that are assessing their school climate. Assistance should include the creation of a technological data management system that will enable schools to better use climate-related information.

STRATEGY: Partner With The Public To Achieve High Standards

- The ABCs Plan should include incentives for schools with alternative school programs modeled upon others that show documented success.
- Schools should be urged to publicize clear roles, rules and expectations regarding safety, discipline and order.
- The State Board of Education should initiate an annual recognition program for businesses that are models in the school/partnership arena and to nonprofit organizations that integrate their programs with the delivery of services to public school students.



Partnering For High Standards

North Carolina is blessed with a wealth of partnering groups. Since the school improvement drive began in the early '80s, dozens and dozens of state and local programs supporting school improvement and the needs of young people have begun. Some are coordinated by nonprofit organizations, others by concerned businesses, and still others by state and local governmental entities.

What is needed today is to bring this wealth of activity into alignment with the unified plan to reach high educational standards.

Thus, the Panel is recommending a range of activities, from community-based partnership training to closer ties between the State Board of Education and the nonprofit and business communities, to more formalized partnership agreements at the state and local levels.

It does so in the firm belief that the effort required to take North Carolina's schools to new heights will fail unless it can enlist the support of parents, concerned community members, other branches of government and the business community.

STRATEGY: Build Partnership Capacity Through Skill Building

- The cornerstone of effective partnerships is training that equips community volunteers and leaders with the skills needed to effectively work together. The State Board of Education should draw from existing partnership training programs such as those offered by the JobReady Program, Communities in Schools, the Public School Forum, NC Partners and others, and provide a resource center for communities wanting to build their partnership capacity.
- Within the school community, parents, students, school personnel and cooperating local, county and state officials need to be directly involved in designing partnership efforts; and they need training to develop partnering skills.

STRATEGY: Build Reciprocal Partnerships With Business

- In appreciation to businesses that open their doors to young people seeking work-based learning experiences, educators must become more familiar with the real world needs of local employers.
- In return for providing resources to the schools, businesses must be meaningfully involved in designing partnership programs.
- In exchange for local schools incorporating school-to-work programs into their curricula, businesses must establish policies that encourage employees to volunteer in schools and offer to provide staff development opportunities to educators.
- In an effort to involve parents in the education of their children, schools must reach out to parents where they live and work while establishing parent centers in schools to give parents easy access to material and resources that would allow them to be learning partners.

STRATEGY: Expand Schooling With Real-World Learning Experiences

- Working with other units of government, business and nonprofit organizations, and a myriad of other community-based groups, schools must reach into the community to identify sites and programs that could offer rich, real-world learning experiences for young people.

STRATEGY: Base Partnerships On Clear Agreements And Assessments Of Needs

- Schools and other governmental agencies providing services to families should jointly survey target families to gauge their needs.
- Partnership agreements among schools and other agencies should be in writing to clearly define roles and avoid duplication.
- Incorporated into any partnership agreement, be it between schools and business, schools and local government, or schools and community agencies, should be a communications component that reinforces the urgency of school improvement.
- Effective partnerships should embrace the concept of continuous improvement and establish quality benchmarks against which their programs will be frequently evaluated.

A POSTSCRIPT

The Panel issues its findings to the Governor and to the State Board of Education with the conviction that the people of North Carolina are prepared to support a bold school improvement initiative.

Throughout this process we have found programs and people making a difference for our children; as important, we have found that the building blocks for creating a world-class system of schooling are in place and need only to be assembled into a foundation upon which excellence can be built. It is that job that now falls to the Governor and to the State Board of Education as they continue the journey toward a system of schools that is second to none.

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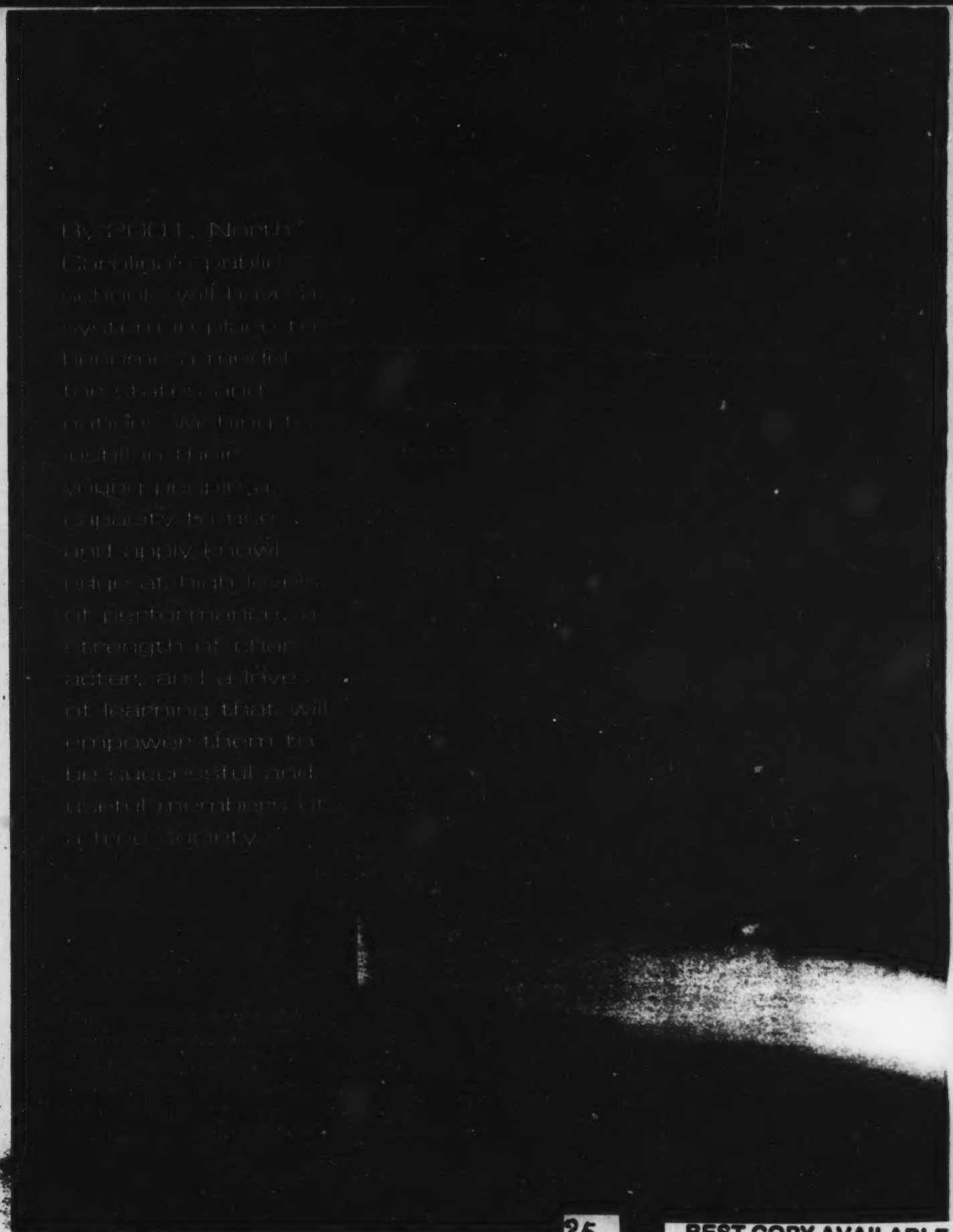

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